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THE TITLES OF THE PSALMS.

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There is no book of the Old Testament which so reveals the inmost hearts of the pious under the former dispensation as the Psalter. We learn something of the exterior of their lives in the historical books, though these are for the most part occupied with events affecting the nation rather than those which concern individuals. We learn the obligations laid upon them and the standard of moral and religious duty set before them in the precepts of the law, which, however, are largely symbolical and ritual, and might leave us in doubt whether their spiritual meaning was duly apprehended or the people rested in the husk of outward ceremonial observance. We learn the ideals of a later age in the discourses of the prophets, with their stern censures of prevailing sins and their fearless exposures of men's departures from God and from duty; but they present most prominently the dark features of their own times. How far the evils and the corruptions which they depict with a strong hand were balanced by the true-hearted sincerity and uprightness of the better classes of the people, they do not inform us.

But the Psalter was Israel's manual of devotion. There we see the pious heart pouring itself out before God in the various experiences of life, offering its prayers and praises, uttering its hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, disclosing its inmost feelings toward God and toward men. Here the real spirit of the religion of the Old Testament reveals itself as nowhere else in its profoundest characteristics. And the substantial identity of true religion in every age is most clearly shown by the extent to which these Psalms have been adopted as the hymn-book of the Christian Church as well as of the temple and the synagogue, and supply the language of devo-

tion, of which they offer a most suitable vehicle and powerful quickener.

This universal adaptability of the Psalms gives them a meaning and value quite independent of the persons by whom or the period and occasion in which they were severally produced. They speak directly to every pious heart, and find an answering echo there. Nevertheless, it is not a question of idle curiosity, but one both interesting and important, Who wrote those sacred songs? and What are the circumstances which called them forth? It adds greatly to the interest of any composition to know when and by whom it was written. This is the case even with those Psalms, which are purely didactic or devotional, and contain little or nothing that reflects or is affected by the particular circumstances under which it was prepared, and which would seem equally appropriate as the utterance of a devout mind at any time and in any situation. When, however, as is frequently the case, the psalm contains personal, local and historical allusions, or when it is interwoven with, or, it may be, grows directly out of the individual or national experiences to which it relates, it is important to its correct and thorough understanding that the precise situation should, if possible, be ascertained, which is there depicted. A knowledge of the history and of the actors in it will throw light upon the psalm, and the psalm will in turn illustrate the history, giving a fuller insight into the feelings and actions of those immediately concerned, as these appeared at the time and are set forth by one who was in the midst of that which he describes.

The determination of the authorship of the Psalms and of the age to which they belong is, further, of eminent consequence in tracing the history of the religion of Israel. These utterances of pious souls reveal their conceptions of God and of duty, the character of their worship, both in its outward forms and in its inward exercises, and the body of their religious faith. If the age of the Psalms can be definitely fixed, the contemporaneous religion of Israel is clearly and indubitably mirrored forth in them, and with this its relation to antecedent and subsequent stages of that religion is necessarily linked. So that the testimony of the Psalms becomes

an important factor in dealing with the theorizing of revolutionary critics respecting the origin and history of the Old Testament religion.

One hundred of the Psalms are in their titles referred to their reputed authors.

1	(the 90th)	is ascribed to Moses.
73		“ David.
2	(viz., 72, 127)	“ Solomon.
12		“ Asaph.
11		“ Sons of Korah.
1	(the 89th)	“ Ethan the Ezrahite.

Are these titles reliable? If they are, the authorship of two-thirds of the Psalms is settled, and the particular occasion on which some of them were composed is further made known. It has been the fashion of late to distrust the testimony of the titles. And yet even critics, as little disposed as Ewald and Hitzig to submit to the trammels of traditional authority, did not venture to set them altogether aside, but confessed that several of the Psalms must be admitted to be the genuine production of David. Thus Ewald speaks of a series of Psalms “ which all indications combine to show can proceed from no other and no less a poet than David himself.” Critics of the school of Kuenen and Wellhausen, however, have adopted a notion of the gradual development of religious ideas in Israel, which is absolutely inconsistent with the admission that David could have composed Psalms breathing such a pure and lofty spirit as those which are attributed to him. They find it essential to the maintenance of their fundamental hypothesis to set these testimonies peremptorily aside. Kuenen says (*Religion of Israel*. I. p. 322): “ It was no longer possible to disguise the fact that not a single psalm or proverb was guaranteed by these headings to be a production of the age of David and Solomon. At last critics had the courage to say that all those titles without distinction are contradicted by the oldest portions of the historical books. . . It is true that a great portion of tradition is thus set aside. . . As a result of such an application of historical criticism, the age of David and Solomon assumes quite a new character.”

In like manner, Dr. Robertson Smith (*Encyclopedia Britannica* xx. p. 32): "The tradition that David is the author of these two collections (viz., Ps. 3-41, 51-72) comes to us, not exactly from the time of the Chronicler, but certainly from the time when the view of Hebrew history which he expresses was in the course of formation. And it is not too much to say that that view implies absolute incapacity to understand the difference between old Israel and later Judaism, and makes almost anything possible in the way of the ascription of comparatively modern pieces to ancient authors." The plain English of which is that the traditional date of the Psalms is utterly irreconcilable with his critical views of "the difference between old Israel and later Judaism." These views oblige him to maintain that the Psalms ascribed to David and other ancient authors are comparatively modern. Delitzsch very properly says (*Comment. on Psalms*, p. 16): "The denial of what has been delivered by historical tradition [in these titles], which has been prevalent since the last decenniums of the preceding century, has now come to be a contemptuous snap-judgment, which would be regarded as madness in any other department of literature, in which the decision was not so biassed by foregone conclusions."

In attempting to arrive at a correct estimate of the value of these titles, a few general considerations bearing on the subject will here be presented. They should in the next place be brought to the test of the internal evidence of the Psalms themselves; but upon this we cannot now enter.

1. These titles embody the oldest accessible tradition of the origin of the Psalms. They have been from time immemorial a part of the text and have the same external vouchers as the body of the Psalms themselves. Sixty-nine of the seventy-three Psalms entitled David's are attributed to him likewise in the Septuagint, the oldest of all the versions and the most ancient voucher that we possess for the text of the Old Testament next to the Hebrew itself. But, on the other hand, stress has been laid* on the circumstance that four of the Psalms ascribed to David in the Hebrew (Pss. 122, 124, 131, 133) do not bear his name in the LXX.;

* *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 111.

and fourteen (Pss. 33, 43, 67, 71, 91, 93-99, 104, 137) are ascribed to him in the LXX. but not in the Hebrew. This, it is said, betrays a tendency in copyists to attach the name of David to Psalms not really his. If four such titles have been added in the Hebrew and fourteen in the Greek since the Septuagint version was made, who can say how many were inserted without authority before that date? And thus suspicion is cast upon them all. Fortunately the Hexapla of Origen here comes to our aid, showing that the Greek versions of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion, as well as the Hebrew of his day, were in exact correspondence with the Massoretic text, as we possess it, in this particular. Explicit statements to this effect have been preserved in respect to each of the aforesaid Psalms with the exception of two (Pss. 95, 124), whose titles do not chance to be mentioned owing to the fragmentary condition of the Hexapla. And the Chaldee Targum further corroborates the exactness of the title of Psalm 124* in the Hebrew. It appears, therefore, that there are four instances, and only four, in which the ascription of Psalms to David in the Hebrew is not confirmed by the LXX. These are the only cases consequently in which there is any legitimate doubt respecting the text; and in these the Hebrew has the support of the other Greek versions.

2. It further appears from indubitable evidence that the titles belonged to an age much more remote than this. They were already ancient when the Septuagint version was made. Many of the titles contain musical directions which were intended to guide in the use of the Psalms in the worship of the temple. They indicate the chief musician to whose oversight they were entrusted, and sometimes specify whether they were to be performed by male or female voices, the tune or air to which they were to be sung, and the instruments which were to form the accompaniment. Several of these terms were no longer intelligible to the translators, and are either incorrectly rendered or simply reproduced in Greek letters. In fact, their true sense became obscured long prior to that time. As Dr. Delitzsch correctly remarks (*Com. über die Psalmen*, p. 16): "The key to understanding them must

* The Targum refers Ps. 124 to David, but not Pss. 122, 131, 133.

have been early lost, for they cannot be explained from the books of Chronicles and Ezra, in which much is said of music, but in which they appear as older constituents of the language revived." And Dr. Robertson Smith admits (*Enc. Brit.* xx. p. 34): "It is not quite clear whether the Chronicler understood them fully." The only satisfactory explanation of this is that these terms belonged to the musical arrangements of the temple, which were in current use before the exile. These were abruptly terminated by the destruction of the city and the removal of its inhabitants. A long suspension of sacred services followed. And when the Jews were permitted to return to their own land, the reduced numbers and the impoverished condition of the early colonists made a complete reproduction of the ancient order of things quite impossible. Through this enforced disuse the meaning of these technical terms gradually faded from their minds, until it was nearly or wholly lost.

And this accounts for the very remarkable circumstance that musical terms, whether in the titles or occurring elsewhere as *Higgaion* and *Selah*, are not attached to all the Psalms, nor to Psalms taken at random, but are limited exclusively to pre-exilic Psalms. However obscure or unintelligible, they are extremely interesting as the sole surviving relics of the musical notation which prevailed in Solomon's temple. They mark the Psalms, in which they are found, as set to music and sung in the manner here indicated in that ancient sanctuary. These musical notes are found in two anonymous Psalms (66, 67) of uncertain date, and besides, only in those which are attributed to David and to Asaph and the other Levitical singers. And Psalms of late date belonging to the guild of Asaph, as Pss. 74, 79, are without these notes. They do not occur in any psalm which is demonstrably post-exilic.

Dr. Robertson Smith attributes the decadence of these musical terms to a much later period, and seeks to account for it by the introduction of Greek art consequent upon the conquests of Alexander, when, as he supposes, the old national music was superseded by that of the west. But this obliges him to assume a preposterously late date for the books

of Chronicles, since these terms were but partially understood when they were written. His hypothesis is moreover clearly set aside by the facts already recited, showing that the musical crisis was induced by the exile.

That the musical notation which we have been considering was pre-exilic, is further established by the psalm of Habakkuk in ch. 3 of his prophecy, with its Selahs and its title and subscription modelled after the titles of the Psalms: "To the chief musician on my stringed instruments. A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, set to Shigionoth." It is to be observed that both the possessive pronoun, and the fact that the psalm is an integral portion of the prophecy, indicate that the inscription is from the prophet's own hand. Again in Hezekiah's psalm, in Isa. 38, we find the technical terms of the Psalter in its closing verse: "We will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of Jehovah." And we are reminded of the technical phrase in the title of Psalm 60: "Michtam of David, to teach," by the words prefixed to David's lament over Saul and Jonathan, 2 Sam. 1: 18, "he bade them teach *the song of the bow*."

This demonstrable antiquity of the technical titles necessarily attaches likewise to the authors' names, not only because the latter are consistent parts of the same titles, but it is a very significant circumstance that the authors' names invariably follow and never precede the musical directions. Any addition made to an already existing superscription would naturally be prefixed to it. There is an illustration of this in Ps. 88, which affords the only instance in the Psalter of a double inscription. Its original title was, "For the chief musician: set to Mahalath Leannoth, Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite." This psalm belonged to an old collection antedating the present Psalter, which was denominated "Psalms of the Sons of Korah." Accordingly, when it was inserted in our present book of Psalms, the words, "A Song, a Psalm of the Sons of Korah," were prefixed to its former title, to indicate the source from which it was taken. Now, it is noteworthy that the invariable order is, "For the chief musician. A Psalm of David," never the reverse.

3. Allusion has already been made to the existence of partial collections of Psalms prior to the formation of the present Psalter. A fresh corroboration may be thence deduced of the conclusion already reached respecting the antiquity of the titles recording the names of the authors. The Revised Version of the Old Testament has made the English reader familiar with the ancient division of the Psalms into five books. These books indicate in a general way successive stages in the growth of the collection, so far at least as this, that the fourth and fifth books are a later appendix to the first three, a fresh body of temple melodies added to those previously in use. This new accession was probably in great part post-exilic, though containing a few ancient compositions. In the first and older portion of the Psalter titles are the rule, in the subsequent portion they are the exception. Of the first ninety psalms only eight are anonymous; of the last sixty, with the exception of eighteen referred to David and Solomon, all are anonymous.

We can push our inquiries yet one step further in tracing the early history of the Psalms. The first three books, which we have seen to be the older portion of the Psalter, have been formed by the combination of two pre-existing collections, called respectively the Prayers of David and the Psalms of Asaph and of the Sons of Korah. Each of these, as they lie in the present book of Psalms, is divided into two parts by the interposition of a portion of the other between its severed segments. The subscription to Psalm 72 marks the termination of one of these: "The Prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." By the help of the titles we are able to discover the other collection, Psalms 42-50, continued Psalms 73-89. If, in order to restore it to its original completeness, we bring these parts together by removing Psalms 42-50 from its present place, there will be left Psalms 1-41, 51-72; and we can hardly be mistaken in assuming that this was the original compass of the primitive body of temple melodies known as the Prayers of David, so called because with very few exceptions all were from his pen. Psalm 72 is the only one that is attributed to another; it bears the name of Solomon. Psalm 10 is commonly supposed to be a continuation of the alphabetic acrostic begun in Psalm 9. Psalm 2 is

in Acts 4: 25 said to have been spoken by the mouth of David; and the internal evidence strongly favors his authorship. There are but three beside which are not in their titles ascribed to David, viz., Pss. 1, 33, 71.

There is no reason, so far as appears, why this collection may not have been coeval with the reign of Solomon, since it contains nothing which can with any certainty be referred to a later period. We learn from 1 Kings 10: 12 that there were singers connected with the temple service from the beginning; and the elaborate arrangements made by David and Solomon in this respect are detailed at length in the books of Chronicles. It is further explicitly mentioned that in the restoration and purification of the temple worship by Hezekiah at the beginning of his reign the commandments of David in this matter were punctiliously obeyed, and "the Levites sang praise unto Jehovah with the words of David and of Asaph the seer," 2 Chron. 29: 25-30. Snatches are even quoted by Jeremiah 33: 11 from Psalms (106, 107, 136) occurring in what is recognized as the later part of the present book, and yet were sung in the temple in his day.

The genuineness of the Davidic psalms is thus vouched for by this ancient collection of the Prayers of David. That this collection now lies before us in precisely its original compass, and that no unauthorized additions were suffered to gain admission to it, appears from the fact that other Psalms entitled David's are to be found in the subsequent portions of our present book. Though recognized as David's, they were inserted in the more recent portion of the Psalter, and thus the integrity of the primitive collection was maintained. We are hence able to distinguish between those Psalms of David which belonged to the temple liturgy from the first and those which were added to it at a later time. That process was repeated in the final constitution of the book of Psalms, which, as we are expressly told, was performed by the men of Hezekiah in relation to the proverbs of Solomon, Prov. 25: 1. Songs of David not previously in use in the temple worship, and yet adapted for the purpose, were culled from various sources and added as an appendix along with others of more recent origin.

The careful discrimination between Psalms of David and those of the Levitical singers, and between both of these classes and all others, is also calculated to inspire confidence in the accuracy of the titles. This further accounts for the fact that no other names of authors were deemed worthy of preservation besides those of these great masters of song, and justifies the belief that no spurious production would be suffered to rank with what was held in such estimation, or to be entitled David's if it was not really his and known to be such.

But Dr. Robertson Smith seeks to neutralize the testimony of this ancient collection of the Prayers of David. He says:* "The collection may not have been framed from the first exclusively with an eye to Davidic poems. But in process of time it may have come to be called Psalms of David because it contained some of his poems. . . And thus, when the first Psalm book was taken up into a longer collection, each psalm may have received a title derived from the current name of the book in which it was found." The title, "Psalm of David," would thus merely indicate the collection from which it was taken, but would give no assurance that it was really David's or that the compiler of the collection supposed it to be his. There is not only no evidence on which to base this conjecture, but it is disproved by Psalm 72 itself. The subscription to this psalm shows that it was unquestionably in the old hymn-book denominated the Prayers of David; and yet it is entitled a Psalm of Solomon. The title was plainly not derived from the collection in which it had stood, but was descriptive of the individual psalm.

There is a further incidental proof of an interesting kind, that the titles were already attached to the individual psalms before the primitive collection was formed. It is well known that the order of the Psalms among themselves was frequently determined by the recurrence of some prominent word or phrase. Thus Psalm 35 follows 34 because "the angel of Jehovah" occurs in both, 34: 7; 35: 5, 6, and nowhere else in the Psalter. Psalm 51 follows 50, because in each material sacrifices are contrasted unfavorably with spiritual. And so

* *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 198.

abundantly elsewhere. Now, it is a most significant circumstance that the link which binds Psalm 56 to 55 is the correspondence between the title of the former and the text of the latter. The former is set to the tune of "the silent dove of them that are afar off;" in the latter the Psalmist exclaims, verses 6, 7, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, . . . 10, then would I wander afar off." The title must be older than this primitive collection to have influenced the arrangement adopted in it.

4. Considerations have now been adduced from the testimony rendered on behalf of the titles by the ancient versions, from their containing musical terms which became obsolete in the exile or shortly after, and from their antedating the ancient hymn-book of the first temple, which is still traceable as the oldest constituent in the gradual formation of the present book of Psalms. These certainly establish their very high antiquity, and prove them to have been in the responsible custody of those officially charged with directing the musical services of the sanctuary. We have thus a strong guarantee of their accuracy and safe transmission. This is further confirmed by the analogy of other titles in the Old Testament. Those that occur in the books of the prophets are with very few exceptions acknowledged to be trustworthy even by the most revolutionary critics. The alleged length of Hosea's ministry has been doubted, but not that he was really the author of the prophecies to which his name is prefixed. Those who dispute the genuineness of Isaiah 40-66 and the closing chapters of Zechariah, lay stress upon the circumstance that these have no special titles indicating their authors. The burdens of Babylon by Isaiah ch. 13, 14, and Jeremiah ch. 50, 51, have been discredited notwithstanding their titles, but these supply a strong argument of their genuineness, which is abundantly corroborated by additional evidence. Hezekiah's psalm, Isaiah 38, and that of Habakkuk, ch. 3, are unchallenged, and their titles afford an exact parallel to those of the Psalter. That of Habakkuk at least must in all probability have been prefixed by the prophet himself. In the opening verse of the last words of David, 2 Sam. 23: 1, his name is announced as the author. There

is much to favor the opinion that the titles of the Psalms are to be attributed to the writers themselves, who were in the habit of prefixing their names to their compositions; or at any rate, that they were placed there by responsible persons cognizant of the fact thus attested. So that, at all events, there is a strong presumption in favor of the correctness of the statements contained in them, which were allowed to be made and permitted to remain, because their truth was known and acknowledged.

5. The titles cannot be, as has sometimes been alleged, the conjectures of a later age, mere inferences deduced from the Psalms themselves respecting their author and occasion; in which case modern critics would be quite competent to review the grounds of judgment and pronounce upon the correctness of the conclusion. But the specific occasion of Psalms of a general nature, e. g., Psalm 34, is sometimes recorded, though they contain no obvious clue to their origin, the circumstance that gave rise to the train of thought pursued in the psalm not being itself the subject of it nor dwelt upon with any prominence. And, on the other hand, there are Psalms, such as Psalms 20, 48, 83, which seem to suggest their own occasion or afford ready materials for an easy and plausible inference, to which no such titles are attached. The natural conclusion is that the titles were based on extraneous information and not inferred from hints or implications in the Psalms; otherwise the obvious would not have been passed by and the more recondite and obscure have been exalted to prominence. Still less can they have been arbitrary and baseless inventions. Then, why were any Psalms left without them? Unfounded fancies could be readily multiplied without limit; and it would be as easy to invent occasions for all as for a part. And by what lucky accident has it happened that random suggestions, if they were such, find such frequent and striking corroboration when they are examined minutely and in detail?

6. Upon the critical assumption of Kuenen and Dr. Robertson Smith and others of like tenor, it is impossible to account for the reference of so large a number of the Psalms of David in their titles, or for his name being given to the

primitive hymn-book of the first temple, as it subsequently was to the present book of Psalms in ancient times, 2 Macc. 2: 13; Heb. 4: 7. If David was by way of eminence "the sweet psalmist of Israel," as he is characterized 2 Sam. 23: 1, if he introduced and regulated the psalmody of the sanctuary, and if he composed a large proportion of the songs that were used in public worship, and set the style for the rest, then it is easy to understand how the whole book came to be popularly called the Psalms of David. *A potiori denominatio fit.* But if in point of fact he wrote none of the Psalms, and the ordering of the service of song attributed to him in Chronicles is an erroneous ascription to him of arrangements made long subsequent to his time, then it remains a puzzle how David ever came to be connected with the preparation of the Psalms in the popular imagination.

The critics here involve themselves in precisely the same difficulty that meets them in their hypothesis respecting the legislation of Moses. The only explanation that Dr. Robertson Smith has to give is that David was famous for his musical skill, 1 Sam. 16: 18, and is credited by Amos 6: 5 with inventing instruments of music, though in a connection suggestive only of revelry and of profane uses. Thence it became customary to speak of the temple choirs as using "the musical instruments of David," Neh. 12: 36. And since the temple music was ascribed to him, the oldest liturgy came to be known in its totality as the Prayers or Psalms of David. This is certainly building a large structure on a very slender foundation. That David was a skilful player on the harp and in that capacity quieted the disturbed mind of Saul, cannot have originated the belief that he was the principal composer of the temple Psalms, if in point of fact he had nothing whatever to do with them. The popular belief must have had some foundation. And if David wrote any of the Psalms attributed to him, however few, the entire hypothesis of the history of Israel's religion framed by the Kuenen and Wellhausen school of critics vanishes into smoke. For they all breathe an elevated and spiritual religion, which, according to the scheme propounded by these critics, could not possibly have existed in David's days.

The forbearance of such as may read this article has been seriously overtaken by this protracted and technical discussion of a theme dry and uninteresting in itself, and yet of no small importance as preliminary to the direct study of the book of Psalms. We have seen the documentary evidence from the ancient versions showing that the titles to the Psalms were a constituent of the text prior to the LXX., the oldest known translation; further, the proof that they were then already so ancient that the meaning of the musical terms associated with them was completely lost; that this musical notation was pre-exilic, a knowledge of its meaning had already begun to fade in the long cessation of its use during the exile, and there is no evidence of its employment subsequently; that these titles are not only limited to the first three books of the present Psalter and such Davidic Psalms as are found in the fourth and fifth books, but they certainly antedate the primitive collection of the "Prayers of David," which carries us so nearly back to the age of the royal Psalmist; that the inscriptions referring particular Psalms to him may well have been prefixed by the author himself, or by some one thoroughly cognizant of the facts regarding their composition. Still more, their trustworthiness thus attested by their high antiquity is confirmed by the analogy of the titles found in the books of the prophets, whose statements respecting the authors of the pieces to which they are prefixed are of acknowledged validity; and from the clear internal evidence that the titles of the Psalms cannot be the conjectures of a later age based on the contents of the Psalms themselves; nor can the traditional ascription of the Psalms to David be accounted for unless some at least are genuinely his. To which it is to be added that the wholesale denial of the existence of Davidic Psalms in the Psalter by the most recent critics is under the constraint of a revolutionary hypothesis respecting the gradual development of Israel's religion, which is still under discussion, and is to be tested by the evidence afforded by these ancient records, and cannot be suffered in advance to shape that evidence into accordance with its own prepossessions.

The full treatment of this subject would demand, what is

of course impossible here, the detailed comparison of individual Psalms with the statements contained in the titles prefixed to them. The writer can only state his own conviction that the result of a careful and unbiassed examination would serve to confirm the preliminary conclusion already reached that these titles are in the general entirely trustworthy, that they deserve our confidence as in the main a reliable tradition respecting the authors of the Psalms and the occasions upon which they were prepared. If in any case the title is clearly incompatible with the psalm to which it is prefixed, it should of course be set aside as erroneous. But where no such incompatibility exists, as it is believed, can be shown in the majority of cases, if not in all, the title should be accepted as a veritable and reliable tradition.